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Follow-up to the Fourth World Conference on Women and to the twenty-third special session of the General Assembly, entitled "Women 2000: gender equality, development and peace for the twenty-first century": implementation of strategic objectives and action in critical areas of concern and further actions and initiatives: the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child

Statement submitted by International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Council of Women, International Federation of University Women, Soroptimist International and Zonta International, non-governmental organizations in consultative status with the Economic and Social Council

The Secretary-General has received the following statement, which is being circulated in accordance with paragraphs 36 and 37 of Economic and Social Council resolution 1996/31 of 25 July 1996.

* E/CN.6/2007/1.



Statement

The member organizations of Project Five-O: International Federation of Business and Professional Women, International Council of Women, International Federation of University Women, Soroptimist International and Zonta International, each in Consultative Status with the Economic and Social Council of the United Nations, are committed to working for the elimination of all forms of discrimination and violence against the girl child, the priority theme for this fifty-first session of the Commission on the Status of Women.

Each of our organizations carries out programs and advocacy for the advancement of the status of women and girls worldwide. In addition, for more than twenty-five years our organizations have partnered together as Project Five-O to provide economic opportunities, education and training for thousands of local women of all ages in developing countries and countries in transition. Programs funded through Project Five-O offer opportunities for women to acquire skills and income that often broaden their role in the family and community as well as enhance the well-being of their family. As recognized in the twenty-seventh special session of the General Assembly on Children in 2002, the achievement of development goals for children, particularly girls, is contingent on women's empowerment.

Moreover, the equal rights of girls and equal participation of women in the social, cultural, economic and political life of societies is an acknowledged prerequisite of the international community for successful and sustainable development. Standing in the way of achieving those goals is discrimination and violence that begin for girls at the earliest stages of life and continue throughout their lives.

Gender inequality must to be universally acknowledged as socially constructed and perpetuated by cultural, economic and social practices that promote patriarchal dominance. Women and men, girls and boys, must work together in all public and private aspects of society to remove barriers to the actualization of gender parity and abolish gender-stereotyping. States must take an active role using legislation and legal decisions to end all discrimination. Despite the existence of an international framework for the protection of the girl child, girls in many countries are deprived of life through female infanticide, prenatal sex selection and sex selective abortion. Girls are frequently neglected and are denied their basic rights to food, clean water, education and health care. Female genital mutilation and early marriage contribute to life-long health problems. Violence against girls has also made them more vulnerable to the HIV/AIDS pandemic and gender inequality has contributed to the lack of essential information, education and health services needed to address this serious problem. It is imperative that the needs of girls including preventive tools and legal protection become a priority of States in their battle against HIV/AIDS.

Girls are more vulnerable to domestic violence, violence in schools and commercial sexual exploitation and trafficking. As many as 150 million girls are raped or subjected to sexual violence each year, usually by someone in their family circle. States must close the gap between international standards and national laws, policies and practices. A comprehensive range of actions that include not only legislation and its enforcement but the provision of child-friendly policies and services, focused on girls, and sensitivity training and awareness are essential if public officials are to act as strong advocates for girls. The collection of age-disaggregated data on the range of issues affecting the girl

child is urged to aid in the formulation of more directed programs. The establishment of targets and timetables as well as the direction of adequate resources to initiatives is critical to the success of girl-friendly programs.

Armed conflicts also increases girls' exposure to sexual violence including rape, torture, forced pregnancy, forced prostitution and trafficking. Members of Project Five-O urge Member States to strengthen their commitment to the implementation of Security Council Resolution #1325 as means of providing special attention to the needs of girls in demobilization, disarmament and reintegration programs.

Domestic work, which often takes the form of unregulated employment and exploitation, is the largest employment category for girls under sixteen years of age, and is often associated with physical, sexual and psychological violence.

Moreover, one million children, both girls and boys, who are coerced, kidnapped, deceived and sold, enter into prostitution, child pornography and similar activities every year.

The empowerment of the girl child herself is central to preventing and eliminating gender-based violence and promoting gender equality through equal participation in decision-making. Access to education at all levels and the development of girl-friendly school environments which are safe, accessible, offer adequate sanitary facilities and include non-gendered curricula and the opportunity for girls to participate equally with boys would strengthen the capacity of girls to build self-esteem and become leaders. Schools that offer flexible hours so girls can complete their work at home, that offer meals as an incentive for poorer families and that have waived costly uniform requirements have had good success in increasing girls' education.

Access to health information and services, including reproductive information and services, must also be extended as an important condition for advancing gender equality between girls and boys and in the family.

Project Five-O organizations urge Member States to renew their commitment to internationally agreed development agreements, such as the Millennium Development Goals, where critical issues for girls are included. National policy development plans, Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers and MDG national reports should add more focus on the girl child. The inclusion of child-focused budgets, especially targeting a girls' rights perspective, would be a tremendous initiative toward fostering the elimination of discrimination and violence against the girl child.

Civil society organizations, particularly non-governmental organizations, have been working with varying degrees of success to promote girls' rights and end violence worldwide through service programs and advocacy efforts. While this encourages us to strive harder, much work remains to be done. Creating dynamic partnerships between Member States and NGOs to further advance issues of gender equality and ending violence, will ensure a sustainable success and strengthen our accomplishments.